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ABSTRACT

This article draws on postmodern curriculum theories to present a critical analysis of the drastic curriculum changes that took place in China during its Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It is hoped that a postmodern perspective will shed some light on why the educational reforms failed during this period. The text examines both sides of the Chinese educational reform and the soundness and the limitations of Mao Tse-Tung's educational theory. It provides a context for postmodern studies and examines educational reforms versus social and political changes in China. Examples are given of the reform in progress and how the tearing down of the educational system without providing the proper structure for a new system led to chaos. The paper claims that Mao's intention to end the deep-rooted feudalism in China was sound, as were the ideas of giving equal opportunities of education to everyone in the society, moving away from traditional teaching methods and making teaching relevant to students. However, it was moving from one extreme to another in the process of reform that lead to the disastrous results of the reform. (Contains 29 references.) (RJM)

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The Educational Reforms in the Cultural Revolution in China: A Postmodern Critique

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The Educational Reforms in the Cultural Revolution in China: A Postmodern Critique

INTRODUCTION

Like many Chinese educators and students whose teaching and schooling experiences happened to coincide with the period of the Cultural Revolution, the author personally experienced the educational reforms that came along with this political movement. People in China have always been bewildered by what happened in that period, why it had such a devastating impact on education in China, and why the reform failed its promises to people. Many questions remain unanswered. This article is a critical analysis of the educational reforms and the drastic curriculum changes that took place in China during its Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in light of postmodern curriculum theories. It is hoped that by taking a postmodern perspective, this analysis will shed some light on why the educational reforms in the Cultural Revolution failed.

Since the Cultural Revolution, together with the educational reforms that took place along with it in China, was an experiment on the largest scale in the world and had influenced the life of a whole generation of young people in China, an attempt to understand this experience may have relevance and implications for other countries, which face similar problems and seek alternatives to the conventional ways of educational development.

RELATED STUDIES

Although the Cultural Revolution ended some twenty years ago, the memory and impact of it still linger fresh. There are available several insightful observations of the influence of Mao and the Cultural Revolution on the development of contemporary Chinese education. However, little

effort has been made to examine Mao's educational thought and the educational reforms during the Cultural Revolution in the context of postmodern curriculum theories.

Singer (1971) does a comprehensive review on the involvement and roles played by young people in the Cultural Revolution and the impact of it on these young people. Singer (1971) recalls, "Mao asked the educated youth to be 'vanguards' of the revolution which involved awakening the masses to the need for revolutionary changes and destroying the elements of bourgeois" (p.80). Educational reforms were conducted to take into consideration of the complaints made by students from poor peasant and worker families that they had being discriminated against by the bourgeois-oriented educational system (Singer, 1971).

Sheringham (1984) describes measures that were taken to popularize education during three decades under the Communist Party's control (from 1950s to 1970s). He also discusses policies which gave priority to students of working-class background, adapted courses to their needs, and which aimed at narrowing the gap between social strata, between town and countryside and between formal and non-formal education during the Cultural Revolution.

Unger (1984) discusses the attempt, during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), to sever links between school performance, often dependent on social class, and admission to higher education and resulting upward mobility. Most students then felt it useless to study because success or failure at school work had no bearing on their future.

Zhou (1988) offers historical observations and perspectives on Chinese educational reforms. He sketches the transition from traditionalism to republicanism which began in the late Qing dynasty and continued through the Republican Revolution of 1911 to the early years of the People's Republic. Zhou also deals with the socio-economic, political and cultural contexts for educational reforms in post Mao period.

Sautman (1991) discusses the radical policy that resulted in a hyperpolicization of education in China during the mid 1970s. A member of the Gang of Four is quoted saying "We'd rather read a couple books less than allow the bourgeoisie to influence our younger generation. I prefer workers without culture to exploiters and spiritual aristocrats with culture" (Sautman, 1991,

p.670), indicating a willingness to sacrifice academic standards in favor of class struggle and revolution.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the postmodern shift and its implications on curriculum development. It serves as the basis for the analysis and discussion of the educational reforms in China. The reasons for taking a postmodern perspective in the analysis are: (1) As Slattery (1995) says that "postmodernism provides an option for understanding the current crises in education and society" (p.22). The author finds the literature on postmodern curriculum development enlightening and informing in the understanding of many contemporary issues in education. An analysis from postmodern perspective may also help answering some questions about the Chinese case. (2) Since the Cultural Revolution took place at the same time when postmodern shift began in the western world, the author wonders if there are any connections between the two events. (3) From readings on postmodern curriculum development, the author keeps finding ideas and practices that are familiar and remind her of the educational reforms she experienced during China's Cultural Revolution. As Turner says,

> I sketch an outline of the complicated relationship between postmodernism and radical politics.... I conclude that there can be an important alliance between progressive politics (in gender issues, multicultural alternatives to racism, in ecology movements and cultural criticism) and postmodernism (Turner, 1990, p.1).

China's Cultural Revolution represented one of the most extreme periods of radical politics in the world. So an analysis from postmodern perspective may help the author and people with similar experiences to understand the nature and to distinguish between the two events.

Postmodern Shift

Before the postmodern shift, there had been at least two previous paradigm shifts in human history: first, the move from isolated nomadic communities of hunters and gatherers to feudal societies with city-states and agrarian support systems; and second, the move from the tribal and

feudal societies to a capitalist industrial-based economy relying on scientific technology, unlimited resource consumption, social progress, unrestrained economic growth, and rational thought (Slattery, 1995).

The first move is called the premodern period or the Neolithic revolution and is dated from about 1000 B.C. to A. D. 1450. The second is called the modern period or the Industrial Revolution and is dated from about A.D. 1450 to 1960. The Neolithic period is characterized by a slow-changing and reversible concept of time rooted in mythology and an aristocratic culture with integrated artistic styles. The industrial period is characterized by a linear concept of time, called the arrow of time, with a bourgeois mass-culture of dominant styles (Slattery, 1995).

The postmodern paradigm shift, which started in Western societies during the 1960s and continues today, involves rethinking some very sacred beliefs and structures that have been firmly entrenched in human consciousness for at least the past five hundred years (Slattery, 1995).

Postmodern cultural analysis characteristically entails an ethicopolitics of inclusiveness, multiculturalism, polylogue, social transformation, antiauthoritarianism, and decentralization. Postmodern modes of cultural criticism frequently focus on marginal groups, popular arts, multiple subject positions, minority education, operations of power and knowledge, and historical contradictions, differing from traditional Arnoldian criticism with its commitments to dominant culture, intellectual disinterestedness, spiritual perfection, social order, and state control of education (Leitch, 1996).

The Center for a Post-Modern World (1990) suggests the following ways that humanity might transcend modernity: a post-anthropocentric view of living in harmony with nature rather than a separateness from nature that leads to control and exploitation; a post-competitive sense of relationships as cooperative rather than as coercive and individualistic; a post-militaristic belief that conflict can be resolved by the development of the art of peaceful negotiation; a post-patriarchal vision of society in which the age-old religious, social, political, and economic subordination of women will be replaced by a social order based on the "feminine" and the "masculine" equally; a post-Eurocentric view that the values and practices of the European tradition will no longer be

assumed to be superior to those of other traditions or forcibly imposed upon others combined with a respect for the wisdom embedded in all cultures; a post-scientist belief that while the natural sciences possess one important method of scientific investigation, there are also moral, religious, and aesthetic intuitions that contain important truths that must be given a central role in the development of worldviews and public policy; a post-disciplinary concept of research and scholarship with an ecologically interdependent view of the cosmos rather than the mechanistic perspective of a modern engineer controlling the universe; and a post-nationalistic view in which the individualism of nationalism is transcended and replaced by a planetary consciousness that is concerned about the welfare of the earth first and foremost.

To sum up, postmodernism regards the world as an organism rather than as a machine, the earth as a home rather than as a functional possession, and persons as interdependent rather than as isolated and independent.

Curriculum Development in Postmodern Era

As the transition from the structures of modernity to a postmodern global society is in process, its influence on the development of curriculum is also tremendous. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) are two major advocates of postmodern curriculum development in the United States. They (1991) state that the society and education in the United States are in crisis, that educators, individually and collectively, can foster positive transformation, and that postmodernism has a great deal to offer academic cultural critics and teachers. They advocate changes in curriculum, governance arrangements, and pedagogical practices. They present observations about the canon and popular culture, Standard English and literacy, student empowerment, the values of modernism and the Enlightenment, and post-Marxist politics.

(1) For Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), the crisis in American education mainly comes from discrimination against subaltern students, interference in classroom life and school organization by central authority, and dedication of the schools to the social and cultural reproduction of corporate ideology. Schools are training mills for the job market, promoting competition, individualism,

consumerism, and instrumental rationality. Schools practice racism, sexism, and class discrimination. They are not interested in turning out students experienced with democratic decision making, working in heterogeneous groups, capable of mounting criticism, or knowledgeable of non-mainstream traditions. The goal of student empowerment is disregarded.

(2) Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) criticize cultural literacy -- the canon of Great Books for its exclusion of popular cultures, silence of nonhegemonic populations, and overlooking of the links between high culture and barbarism. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue that tradition should be respected, expanded, pluralized, and critically assessed, not simply revered and reproduced; its relation to historical struggles and contradictions should be explored, not suppressed.

(3) According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), the principles of postmodern curriculum development include: students' tacit knowledge of cultural codes should serve as a ground for curriculum construction; curriculum materials need to be relevant to student-oriented modes of learning; cultural critique is a valued mode of analysis; the many "dialects" of English present in heteroglot society are not forbidden, and the white middle-class dialect (Standard English) is taught to subaltern students as a second language for business and political purposes; multiple literacies rather than one universal literacy predominate because of the existence of the different languages, histories and ways of experiencing the world; schools should be associated with play and pleasure rather than discipline and labor.

(4) The governance of schools ideally should be done by local students and teachers, who make decisions on curriculum, taking into consideration the recommendations of school boards, state authorities, principals and parents. No requirements or mandatory standards set by legislative authorities exist. The monovocal classroom is replaced by focus groups, tutorials, and self-study courses located in libraries, labs, and fields sites as well as classrooms. Class lengths and frequencies vary, and the number of subjects is reduced. Students' voices become important factors in decision making. Students are empowered under democratic contexts (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991).

(5) Postmodern education criticizes traditional pedagogy for its dedication to transmission, recitation, and mastery of fixed and ordered knowledge and information; and for its simple, arduous learning and submission to authoritative materials and methods. Postmodern pedagogy seeks to empower students to interrogate representations of subjectivity and society and to be concerned critical citizens experienced with democratic governance. The teacher's task is to promote democratic public spheres and critical citizens (Ibid.).

(6) Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) believe both modernism and postmodernism contain reactionary and progressive elements. While they are committed to postmodernism, they seek to maintain certain key principles of modernity, which include democracy, liberty, justice, equality, agency, truth, and reason. Aronowitz and Giroux are post-Marxists. Neither of them believes or hopes that a revolution led by workers will sooner or later usher in a socialist society (Ibid.).

Slattery (1995) also discussed five guiding principles for an integrated global and local vision for curriculum development in the postmodern era:

> (1) A process approach to education is capable of engendering a significant reconceptualization of the nature of schooling globally as well as the experience of education locally because it respects the unique development of the individual and recognizes the interrelationship of all experiences. The emergent nature of this reconceptualization rejects hierarchical, authoritarian, patriarchal, and hegemonic ideologies, as well as models of curriculum committed exclusively to educational outcomes outside process and context (Slattery, 1995, p.252).
>
> (2) Modern behaviorist emphasis in schooling -- the unrelenting commitment to behavioral objectives, learning hierarchies, "value-neutral" empirical analytical methodologies, goals and objectives, rote memorization, and competitive learning environments -- is outmoded and detrimental to the emergence of an appropriate global postmodern educational experience. Teachers must be lifelong learners and students must be leaders of instruction. A hermeneutic circle must be formed in classrooms where the discourse is shared, empowering, emerging, and tentative. This is a dramatic break with

modern bureaucratic curriculum paradigms (Slattery, 1995, p.253).

(3) Postmodernism is eclectic and kaleidoscopic, and should move beyond the oppressive structures of modernity. The postmodern curriculum challenges us to get on with the business of providing concrete options and inspiring hope in the midst of global social and educational crises. Educators in the postmodern era are not reticent to engage both poststructuralists and constructivists, males and females, and a diversity of all people, of all colors, races in dialogue, and to incorporate language analysis and process philosophy into our curriculum proposals (Slattery, 1995, p.254).

(4) Our educational proposals must also attend to the problem of alienation, destruction, decadence, and evil so as to avoid the pitfalls of facile utopianism prevalent in some critical political analysis.... Administrators and teachers must be attentive to language, especially as it is politically, socially, and historically embedded. Our language must be inclusive on all levels of communication (Slattery, 1995, p.254).

(5) It is important to incorporate hermeneutics, phenomenology, social psychoanalysis, liberation theology, process theology, race, feminism, and specific cultural issues that will support efforts to understand curriculum for global transformation and expose postmodern proposals to a wider audience (Slattery, 1995, p.255).

THE ANALYSIS

Educational Reforms vs. Social and Political Changes in China

Looking at the modern history of Chinese education, one cannot fail to see that there has always been a close link between educational reforms and social and political changes. One political regime after another reformed education in China to suit their political and economic goals. Hayhoe (1988) provides us with some examples:

> The late Qing modernizers selected Japanese patterns for the way they combined modern knowledge structures with the preservation of Confucian social and moral values. Nationalist reformers tended to emulate European models with their attractive potential for

centralized state control over all levels of education. Finally, early Communist leaders adopted Soviet patterns (i.e. heavy emphasis on engineering programs and on school time devoted to production labor) which they felt would ensure a rapid reshaping of the whole education system to suit socialist construction. In each case, however, the borrowed models were subsequently rejected, with this process culminating in the violent attacks of the Cultural Revolution on both foreign influences and persisting feudal values in education (p.92).

Thus, education in China has always been linked to politics both institutionally and philosophically. As the traditional education with its imperial civil service examination system, which was designed for the selection of government officials, was abolished in 1905, the aim of education shifted from the emphasis on the reproduction of a scholar class to bringing about desired social change as well as preserving social cohesion in Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Republic. This Republic was a product of the impact of Western democracy.

When the communists took power in 1949, the objective of education became that of training a new generation of ideologically trustworthy and technically competent Chinese for the development of socialism. Mao referred to the new generation as morally, intellectually, and physically developed laborers who are socialist-minded.

The Cultural Revolution and the Educational Reforms

The Cultural Revolution was one of the major political movements in China since 1949, which affected the field of education. Sautman (1991) says that the radical policy of hyper-politicization peaked during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. In late 1965, Mao Zhedong, the late chairman of the Communist Party of China, felt that his party was creating a new and privileged elite, which hindered the socialist revolution, and felt that there was a threat to his socialist regime from people like Liu Shaoqi, the number one capitalist roader, and Deng Xiaoping, Liu's major supporter. So Mao accused the party for having capitalist tendencies, bureaucratism, elitism, inefficiency, and loss of revolutionary fervor. He launched the Cultural Revolution by

calling young people in China to revive the revolutionary spirit.

Millions of teenagers, organized into brigades of Red Guards, took Mao at his words: "Bombard the headquarters!" -- party officials and managers of factories and communes were dragged from their offices and beaten up, and revolutionary offices were set up to replace the old; "Destroy poisonous weeds!" -- intellectuals and capitalist-roaders were bullied and humiliated publicly, and sent to work in remote areas to learn from the people; "Sweep away the old to bring forth the new!" -- museums and libraries were sacked, temples and historic sites vandalized (Major, 1989). As students, workers, commune members and people from all walks of life were busy participating in the Cultural Revolution, everything was shut down in the country. All production stopped, and the country became stagnated. Schools were closed so that teachers and students could concentrate on "destroying the four olds" -- old culture, old ideology, old customs, and old habits. All forms of the old -- old text books, literature, music, movies, plays, and Chinese paintings were all banned in schools. To many, this was an anticultural revolution.

Education, being a key component of the state structure and having a considerable impact on social and economic development, became one of the first targets of attack then. Mao said in 1966,

> While the students' main task is to study, they should also learn other things. That is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge; they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs. They should also criticize the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer (as cited in Sheringham, 1984, p.77).

There was a revival of interest in Confucian ideas in the early 1960s to an extent not seen in China since 1949. To revolutionize the Chinese education system, Mao believed that people would have to part with their Confucian past. He believed that education then was dominated by Confucian ideas and did not fit with the goal of building a socialist country. Confucius was criticized for trying to use education to restore a slave society that had declined in his times. This

was an implied accusation of Mao's political rivals like Liu Shaoqi for advocating capitalism and restoration of a system which favored the ruling class only. Education then was believed to be oppressive and unfavorable to the children of the working class.

In theory, the ultimate goal of Confucian education was the perfection of people in the ethical sense -- learning the rules of social relationships and of ethical codes; in practice, traditional Chinese education was concerned more with the preparation and selection of the ruling elite than with the true education and development of the personality.

Confucius once said that those who labor with their brains should govern those who labor with their brawn. Confucius thought it was right for scholars to be fed by physical laborers. Confucian education prompted authoritarian rather than equal social relationships. For example, he advocated that the relationship between the teacher and the student should be like that between the heaven and the earth, the ruler and the subject, the father and the son, that is between the superior and the inferior. Confucius concentrated on feudal moral values and notions such as filial piety and the chastity of women.

Traditional education was more concerned about book knowledge than practical skills, which Confucius dismissed as trifling skills of a scribe. Instruction in traditional Chinese education stressed mechanical memorization and suppressed both the spirit of free inquiry and the initiative of the learner. The dominant teaching style in traditional education was in favor of transmission of factual classical knowledge rather than the development of the ability to learn, and in favor of passive adaptation to environment rather than active transformation of it.

School admission examinations determined who was able to enter each level of education. The competitions among students were tough. Students who came from educated bourgeois families tended to do better in the entrance examinations than students from semi-literate working class families. In 1966 Mao issued a radical decree which abolished the university entrance examinations,

> A new method of enrollment, a combination of recommendation and selection in which proletarian politics are right to the fore.... The old examination system is a serious violation of the Party's class line. It shuts out many outstanding children of workers, former poor

and lower-middle class peasants and revolutionary cadres.... It opens the gates wide to the bourgeoisie to cultivate its own successors (as cited in Unger, 1984, p.94).

Education was made available to all children through senior middle school. Links between classroom achievement and upward mobility was cut entirely. All middle school graduates were assigned directly to jobs, no consideration was given to academic records when these job positions were divided. Whether one went to college or not was decided by the work institution and based on one's job performance. Recommendations to go to college would be given to those who worked well. The abolition of all entrance examinations and the cutting of the links between academic success and careers were intended to give more chances to working-class children and to eradicate gaps between students from different backgrounds.

Moreover, Mao was concerned that academic competition in the classroom bred individualist and careerist values, and if young people entered universities direct from high schools on the basis of their academic achievements and subsequently moved into specialized careers with the status of experts, their life experience would have put them out of touch with the political interests of the working people (Unger, 1984). Many students, after three years' education under the old educational system, were found to feel embarrassed to recognize their parents, their own roots, and their home cultures.

In 1968, the reformed school curriculum had the following features: (1) it played down the systematic teaching of theory and taught concepts that were relevant to industrial and agricultural work; (2) students academic excellence was no longer rewarded or admired in the classroom; (3) classroom learning was to be combined with work in the fields; (4) the entrance examination was eliminated; (5) school graduates were assigned jobs in factories or sent to work on farms, and selected from there to go to universities (Unger, 1984); (6) the length of pre-tertiary education was cut down from 12 years to 10 years (five years for elementary and five years for middle school).

Schools faced many problems. Teachers had a hard time getting students back to schools and readjusted to the routine of school life after having them running loose on the streets for

several years; the teaching profession, which had been bombarded by the revolution was demoralized; text books and curriculum were ideologically constrained and full of political jargon. What is more, students were not motivated to learn. They felt study at school was useless. Students chatted and slept in classes instead of listening to teachers. They either came to school without doing their homework or simply skipped school. They felt learning had nothing to do with their future. They would go to work in a factory or on a farm no matter how well or how bad their school work was. Why bother learning calculus when all they needed would be nothing more than multiplication tables? Why bother learning about planting rice when they were not enthusiastic about doing farm work and living the hard life of a peasant? Further more, if they had a "good father" -- a father who was a party official or who has connections, they would get a good job, or go to a university anyway.

As Huang Shuai, a teenage girl, became famous in China for challenging her teacher's authority, students were encouraged to learn from her. Under the slogan "dare to rebel," teachers were scorned and humiliated personally; classrooms became chaotic. For example, a physics teacher trying to get some chalk from her drawer, got a handful of dirt instead. When Zhang Tiesheng, a university student, refused to take exams from bourgeois teachers, he jumped out of the classroom window in the middle of the exam. Zhang became a national hero whom students modeled. Evaluation and assessment of classroom learning were in chaos.

Schools and universities were run by the Revolutionary Committees set up according to Mao's speech in the summer of 1968,

> In carrying out the proletarian revolution in education, it is essential to have working-class leadership; it is essential for the masses of workers, in cooperation with the Liberation Army soldiers and the activists among the students, teachers, to bring about a revolutionary three-in-one combination, and to carry the proletarian revolution in education to the end. The workers' propaganda teams should stay permanently in schools and take part in fulfilling all the tasks there. In the countryside, schools should be managed by the poor and lower-middle class peasants -- the most reliable ally of the working class (as cited in

Sheringham, 1984, p.78).

The school year was divided into several parts: classroom study for five months, factory work for one month, farm work for one month, and stay in the army for another month to learn how to shoot, to get up at 5:00 a.m., and to march with a heavy blanket roll for 20 miles. The purpose was to give students reeducation by workers, peasants, and soldiers so they would not lose touch with the working class and would not become bourgeois successors in the future.

After Mao's death, and when the Cultural Revolution was ended, the country's focus turned from class struggle to economic construction. Deng Xiaoping declared in 1978 that present speedy economic and technical development demands rapid improvement in the quality and efficiency of education. The stress on quality of education rather than political purity brought back many practices of the traditional education, such as competitive university entrance examinations, double-track system of education, and school achievement-based job assignments. There was no more reeducation from the working class people, and teachers gained back their esteem and authority.

A Postmodern Critique of the Educational Reforms

Examining the educational reforms in the Cultural Revolution through postmodern theories, both elements of modernity and postmodernity were found. The postmodern elements of the Cultural Revolution will be discussed first.

To start with, education has never been neutral but ideological and political to Chinese educators. The Chinese always believe that education carries ideology and is a good way to inform people. The objective of education in China during the Cultural Revolution was to train a new generation of ideologically trustworthy and technically competent Chinese for the development of socialism. Kincheloe (1993) writes, "Critical postmodern teachers are not politically neutral, as they identify with a critical system of meaning and all of its allegiances.... On a daily basis teachers choose to include some forms of legitimate particular beliefs while delegitimating others" (p.39). Giroux (1988) argues against the traditional view of classroom instruction and learning as a neutral

or transparent process removed from the juncture of power, history, and social context. He believes that education should empower students for the future transformation of society towards the direction of democracy and equality .

Corresponding to Aronowitz and Giroux's (1991) crises theory of education in the United States, the Chinese leaders during the Cultural Revolution felt that education in China was in crises and needed reforms. They believed that bourgeois and traditional ideas represented by the old text books and curriculum had been "poisoning" the next generation, and the old force was fighting with the new for successors.

Second, the reforms in the Cultural Revolution were concerned about the education of, and the opening up of more opportunities for the underprivileged. The competitive university entrance examinations were abolished so that more children of the working class could go to universities. An increasing number of children of workers, peasants, and government officials were admitted to universities and colleges to the exclusion of the descendants of the bourgeoisie in the Cultural Revolution. The reforms also emphasized the practical skills, experiences, and family values brought to school by students from working class families.

Postmodern curriculum development is concerned about multiracial / multicultural education, and suggestions are made for changing school structures and curriculum to better accommodate children of subaltern cultures. Giroux (1988) reveals how the fundamental public services that Americans generally associate with schooling, such as the meritocratic empowerment of all individuals regardless of race, class, faith, or gender, are subverted by the very contradictions which constitute them. The eclectic and kaleidoscopic nature of postmodernity challenges educators in the postmodern era to engage males and females, and a diversity of all people, of all colors and races in dialogue.

Third, in the Cultural Revolution, Confucian educational ideas, memorization of book knowledge without questioning, and teachers' absolute authority were criticized. The curriculum was reformed so that students could learn theories through practices or hands-on experience. Students could learn practical skills that were relevant to their lives. Students worked on farms,

factories, and in the army during each school year. Some classes were taught in the fields by workers and farmers.

Postmodern curriculum reform regards traditional education as oppressive and producing loyal, docile, and obedient citizens. The banking method of education is challenged. As Freire (1970) says,

> The banking concept of education mirrors oppressive society, and regards men as adaptable and manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world, and the more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them (p.54).

Postmodern curriculum also wants to replace monovocal classrooms by focus groups, tutorials, and self-study courses located in libraries, labs, and field sites as well as classrooms.

Fourth, during the Cultural Revolution the governance of schools was moved from the hands of bourgeois intellectuals to committees made up of local workers, soldiers, peasants, and "politically correct" students and teachers. Postmodern theorists believe that the governance of schools ideally should be done by local students and teachers, who make decisions on curriculum, taking into consideration the recommendations of school boards, state authorities, principals and parents. No requirements or mandatory standards set by legislative authorities exist. Both reforms want some changes on the governance of schools.

The elements of the educational reforms in the Cultural Revolution that are not in line with postmodern curriculum development are also very important:

First, the definition of "culture" seems to be different for the two groups of educational reformers. The Cultural Revolution was, in fact, anti-cultural, and an anti-old feudal ideas' movement. Old cultural and feudal ideas in the Cultural Revolution were related to ideology, oppression, class, and gender. Intellectuals and professionals were criticized for wanting to return to those old days, and for promoting all old feudal and cultural elements in socialist China.

The reform in China was aimed at breaking the old and establishing the new. For

postmodern theorists, culture can be readily broken down into dominant culture and subordinate culture. Dominant culture refers to social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society. Subcultures are involved in contesting the cultural space or openings in the dominant culture (McLaren, 1994). So "culture" represents issues in different racial, gender, and social economic and political status for postmodern theorists.

The most important difference between the curriculum development in the Cultural Revolution in China and that in the postmodern era in the United States is that the Cultural Revolution politicized education while postmodern curriculum aims for political education. The difference is that politicized education tries to control education and people's mind through politics; political education aims at making people aware of the political nature of education and liberating their minds.

During the Cultural Revolution, "The radical policy current favored at least a temporary hyperpoliticization of education, by placing 'politics in command' over all aspects of learning, even if underdeveloped expertise resulted" (Sautman, 1991, p. 670). Education was viewed as serving "proletarian politics" and creating a "new socialist person," and was to be primarily political and social, rather than economic. Education was to serve the general political purpose of the government. Thus all aspects of education, knowledge, ideology, curriculum, and administration were controlled politically. It encouraged "critical" thinking, but only to the extent that it was "politically correct." Thus, politicized education is domination rather than liberation.

Postmodern curriculum development aims at empowering students by encouraging democracy, and promoting active citizenship. There are no elements of indoctrination or domination in the rhetoric of political education. Simon (1992) says,

> (T)eaching and learning must be linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is "not yet" -- in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived (as cited in

Shannon, 1992, p.144).

Another fundamental difference is that the Chinese reformers wanted to strengthen and maintain a socialist society where everyone is supposed to be equal, and they wanted to achieve it by way of a revolution with their working class allies. The postmodern reformers of education in this country seek to maintain the status quo of the U.S. society. They want to make changes within the system and to make it a more democratic, liberal, just, free, and friendly place for people to live in. Aronowitz and Giroux are post-Marxists. They do not believe or hope that a revolution led by workers will sooner or later usher in a socialist society.

The educational reform in China was a top-down movement and the postmodern reform in the United States is a bottom-up movement. The reforms in China were generated by the government while the reforms in this country are grass-roots movements. The advocates of postmodern theorists are still arguing for revising and trying to convince people, while the Chinese reforms happened as the largest scale experiment of its kind in the world.

Interpretation of the Analysis

This study has analyzed the educational reform in the Cultural Revolution through a postmodern perspective. It has shown both sides of the Chinese educational reform and distinguished the soundness and the limitations of Mao's educational theory. It has provided a better understanding of why the educational reform in the Cultural Revolution failed its promises to the people.

To begin with, the intention to get rid of the deep-rooted suffocating feudal ideas in China was a sound one. The idea of giving equal opportunities of education to everyone in the society was well-grounded. Moving away from traditional teaching methods and making teaching relevant to students were also sound reforms. Sheringham (1984) comments,

> It is now claimed in China that the Cultural Revolution was a mistake and a tragedy. As the "revolution in education" was an integral part of this policy, it is also condemned for both political and educational reasons. If it is judged purely in terms of academic standards, then

of course, one must agree that there were sacrifices, creating many gaps in "expertise." If, on the other hand, we take into consideration the fundamental aims of popularizing education and opening up educational opportunities across society, then we should be wary of dismissing the "revolution in education" as altogether a failure (p.79).

However, it is the moving from one extreme to another in the process of reform, the throwing away of "the baby with bath water," the breaking down without sound construction, the appearing of new elites, and the politicized and violent nature of the reform that lead to the disastrous results of the reform. The following are some examples to illustrate these points.

Initially, values like diligence, collaboration, modesty, and respect for elders and teachers were discarded together with Confucian male chauvinist ideas because people failed to distinguish the virtues from the dross of the old Chinese culture.

Second, the imagined political struggle and line drawn between working classes and intellectuals led to personal attacks on thousands of innocent teachers and professionals. This was caused by the political and violent nature of the social revolution.

Third, some specific strategies of the reformed curriculum and examination system proved to be misguided and wasted the schooling of many young people. The disconnection between academic achievement and students' future career, the emphasis on political correctness over academic achievement, and the neglecting of theory learning and over-emphasis on hands-on experiences were all examples of poor decisions.

Fourth, Shannon's (1992) theory proves to be true in the case of the Cultural Revolution. He says teaching is liberating and dominating, and schooling is also liberating and dominating. Yes, the Cultural Revolution both liberated students and dominated them. It liberated students and people because it opened their eyes to the inequality existing in education and society; it dominated them because it did not allow, or at least failed to promote, real democratic, independent and critical thinking ability; it imposed political control. As Freire (1970) put it,

If teachers help students from oppressed communities to read the word but do not also teach them to read the world, students might become literate in a technical sense but will

remain passive objects of history rather than active subjects (as cited in Lankshear and Mclaren, 1993, p.82).

The Cultural Revolution opened people's eyes but imposed the government's intentions on the people and dictated people's thinking. Thus, people were forced to follow the government right or wrong. The Cultural Revolution outcast one form of oppression for the Chinese people -- the feudalistic ideas, but replaced it with another form of oppression -- dictatorship from the new elites.

Human societies should learn from history. Hopefully, the experiences of the Chinese educational reform will not be forgotten or repeated. The conclusion is that those practices in the Cultural Revolution in line with postmodern curriculum development seem to be sound ones, while those deviating from the postmodern curriculum development seem to be problematic.

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